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Illinois Issues

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Getting there

Finding the cash to go
to college is turning out
to be almost as tough as
attending the classes



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT SPRINGFIELD

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June 2003

Dear Friends of *Illinois Issues*:

The founders of this magazine – Sam Gove, Paul Simon, and the late Sam Witwer, Sr. – knew that engaged citizens need more than daily news reports to make sense of their government. They concluded that a quality public affairs magazine published by a university could become a vital source of information, and it has. The magazine's place in the Illinois media mix is now well established.

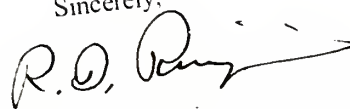
I think you will agree that for nearly 30 years, *Illinois Issues* has successfully combined scholarship and journalism to provide you with the context and insight you need to make sense of this state's public affairs.

Now UIS faces a special challenge. The state's budget crisis means budget cuts for many university programs, including our financial support for *Illinois Issues*. The magazine had to cut its budget this fiscal year. In the next fiscal year that begins July 1, it will need to cut some more. It seems certain that the magazine will have to generate more revenue from advertising, subscription income and from donations.

That's where you come in; that's why your support is important. Please subscribe if you haven't already. If you receive the magazine's letter asking for a contribution, please send a generous donation. The magazine has always been funded partially by donors, just as your public radio station is.

My personal commitment to *Illinois Issues* is strong. *Illinois Issues* is still the only magazine devoted exclusively to covering Illinois government and politics, as well as the social and cultural life of this complex state. It has a bright future. If it did not exist, someone would create a publication like it, but it would not be better than *Illinois Issues*. It couldn't be. So it deserves your support now more than ever.

Sincerely,



Richard D. Ringeisen
Chancellor

Peggy Boyer Long



Ethics seem to be on the agenda. But, remember, our roster of political scoundrels dates to statehood

by Peggy Boyer Long

What is it about Illinois? The Land of Lincoln has a long-running, nationwide reputation for political corruption, and we aren't in a position to complain. There is hard evidence—even Illinoisans can see it—to rank this state among the ethically challenged. These days especially, when it wouldn't come as any surprise if the slogan on Illinois' license plates read, "What's in it for me?"

Federal prosecutors now have the attention of even the most jaded. The racketeering convictions of a former statewide official's top aide and—this is a first—his campaign committee inspired political scholars and practitioners to convene a summit on ethics. It spurred the governor to push to train state workers. And it motivated lawmakers to agree on some reforms.

Ethics, it seems, is on the agenda.

Yet, we should remember, Illinois' roster of political scoundrels dates from statehood, and they are larger-than-life figures. Some are remarkable for the scale of their greed. Some because their ambitions reached the humorous. Some because their schemes touched on the banal, objects of the everyday that became a shorthand for character. Shoeboxes, say, or barbecue grills and industrial-size shredders.

Even when measured on a national

scale, these characters are standouts. Why is that? Former federal judge Abner Mikva jokes that "it can't be the water." Illinois, after all, shares the shores of Lake Michigan with Wisconsin. But the political culture of the Badger State, though it has faced scandals of its own over the past couple of years, shares nothing in common with that of the Prairie State.

The reasons, says Mikva, who has represented Chicago in the Illinois legislature and in Congress, are cultural and political. "Illinoisans have a weird pride in their history of political corruption." It's true. We love tales about the late Secretary of State Paul Powell, who reportedly left shoeboxes full of cash, and long-gone Chicago boddlers "Hinky Dink" Kenna and "Bathhouse John" Coughlin. The statesmen we leave to historians.

As for political scientists, they place Illinois among those states with individualistic political cultures. Unlike the citizens of Wisconsin, who tend to see civic engagement as a moral enterprise, Illinoisans are generally disposed to leave government to professionals, who, broadly speaking, see public service as a form of personal entrepreneurship. An approach that doesn't bother Illinoisans much unless the grab for spoils gets out of hand.

In their book *Illinois Politics and Government: The Expanding Metropolitan Frontier*, Sam Gove and Jim Nowlan write that "in Chicago parlance, the culture is best described as 'Where's mine?' but in more genteel circles, the Illinois system might be termed a government-as-marketplace, where a give-and-take process allocates 'fair shares' of the pie to those who have earned a place at the table."

This traces to the state's earliest settlement. Immigrants brought their cultures with them and passed them on. In this way, too, the political culture of City Hall is modeled to the next generation. Same goes at the Statehouse, where Paul Powell is reputed to have said, "My friends eat at the first table."

So is it nature or nurture? Mikva and a panel of political experts wrestled with this and other questions in April, just as Illinois lawmakers entered the final month of their spring session. The summit, "Politics and Ethics in Illinois: Past, Present and Future," was sponsored by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Center for Governmental Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield, and among the panelists were former state officials, reformers and political scientists.

On this they agreed: The majority of Illinois officials are honest and well-

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intentioned. But panelists weighed whether opportunity, if not propensity, for corruption is endemic to our governmental system, or whether this is the legacy of a few bad apples.

Mikva emphasized structure. He recommended reducing the number of governments, which, in Illinois, includes the state, counties, municipalities, townships, school districts and special units such as park districts. "A plethora abounds," he says. "It confounds, it astounds and it's hard as hell to dislodge." His argument: Multiplicity confuses voters, enables governments to work anonymously and reduces public accountability. All reasons elected officials are unlikely to decide soon that less is more.

Individual responsibility got more emphasis. Mike Lawrence argued that problems stem from the culture an official establishes. Lawrence, who was press secretary to former Gov. Jim Edgar, is now associate director of the Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. And political scientist Kent Redfield at UIS, who tracks the relationship between money and politics, noted the "win at all costs" values taught by some government aides to workers "lower down the food chain."

But, no surprise, the widest range of opinion centered on the value and limitations in prohibitions. Former state agency director Howard Peters III, for one, saw no reason to allow public officials to accept gifts of any kind for any reason. Former state Sen. Howard Carroll countered that "you can't legislate ethics; you can't cover every possible situation." But Alan Rosenthal, a political scientist at Rutgers University and an expert on states' legislative ethics, argued some laws can change a capital's culture, though maybe not a state's culture.

But in Illinois, the "burglars," as Mikva calls them, tend to overreach. The federal probe into licenses for bribes has netted dozens of convictions, and Illinoisans have been treated to tales of state workers campaigning on the taxpayer's dime, stealing government property and attempting to destroy evidence by grilling it in a barbecue or shredding it to bits.

Lawmakers couldn't ignore this. In the final hours of their session, they agreed to spell out political activities state workers are prohibited from performing on state time — and ban, specifically, theft of state property to politick. They prohibited taxpayer-funded bonuses to state workers for campaigning. They signed on to ethics training for state workers, and established protections for whistle blowers. They took a pass, though, on authorizing the means to enforce these strictures through inspectors general or new ethics commissions. And they chose not to put tighter restrictions on lobbyists' gifts to public officials. Cynthia Canary, who heads the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform and served on the summit panel, faxed an immediate response: "There was little evidence today that Illinois leaders are serious about changing business as usual."

Can Illinois change? Summit panelist David Kenney argued that "you don't change it by making a few rules, no matter how carefully we write them." Kenney, who has headed two state agencies and taught political science at SIU-C, believes this state's political culture is deep-seated, and any major change will take time.

Other Illinoisans got a chance to weigh in, though. The Survey Research Office at UIS interviewed more than 400 randomly selected households for approximately half an hour on attitudes about corruption. The poll was taken in April. Among the results: Nearly 80 percent of those surveyed believe corruption in state government does affect the lives of citizens; almost 90 percent believe government employees found guilty of corruption should be "punished severely"; but almost 70 percent agree that "law enforcement in Illinois has tended to look the other way when it comes to political corruption." In short, Illinoisans appear, for now, to be taking political corruption in their state seriously enough to want to see the perpetrators caught and punished.

And that's just what the federal prosecutors have been doing. □

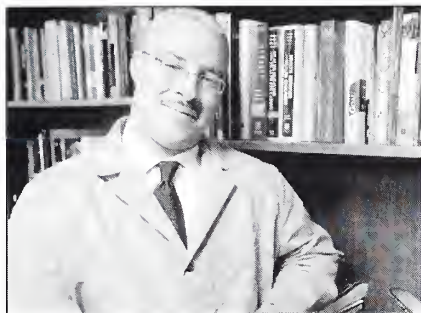
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The story of Peter Fitzgerald's political legacy depends on the narrator's perspective

by Aaron Chambers

The way U.S. Sen. Peter Fitzgerald tells the story of his legacy, he's leaving at the top of his game.

He installed three independent U.S. attorneys in Illinois. He blocked efforts on Capitol Hill to cement into federal law a deal to expand O'Hare International Airport. And — an accomplishment that seems to give him the most satisfaction — he bucked the state's GOP establishment.

The outgoing senator even has statistical data to demonstrate this last point. In early April, the Republican from Inverness released the results of a lengthy poll in which he pitted himself against likely Democratic contenders for his seat, including Illinois Comptroller Dan Hynes, millionaire Blair Hull and state Sen. Barack Obama of Chicago.

He also tested his chances against a vocal Republican critic in the state's Congressional delegation and his most powerful adversary in the state GOP: U.S. Rep Ray LaHood of Peoria and U.S. House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert of Yorkville, respectively.

He won all of the projected races, Fitzgerald proudly notes. "Who has more friends in the Republican Party in Illinois?" he asks. "No one in that poll."

Yet two days later it was reported that the senator would not seek re-election, prompting pundits to suggest that Fitzgerald simply wanted people to

Fitzgerald says he's retiring from the U.S. Senate after one term to spend more time with his family — though he also says Republicans are at a disadvantage in a state that has leaned Democratic in recent elections.

think he wasn't running from a probable loss. Strategists in both parties regarded him as the most vulnerable senator facing re-election in 2004.

Fitzgerald says he's retiring from the Senate after one term to spend more time with his family — though he also says Republicans are at a disadvantage in a state that has leaned Democratic in recent elections. He argues the poll was intended to disprove naysayers.

"It shows there's no Republican in the state who could have beat me in the primary. No one. It also shows that I beat all the Democrats."

But some of Fitzgerald's greatest opponents have been members of his own party. It's only natural. There's always conflict between a political establishment and somebody who works outside its scope. Somebody elected without party support is not

beholden to its interests. The senator's defenders say he simply plays hardball with party leaders who mistreat him. From the party's perspective, Fitzgerald promotes antagonism to further his personal political agenda. In any case, the friction clearly is mutual.

"I think the Illinois Republican Party has adopted too much the model of the Chicago Democrats and tried to engage in machine politics that is based on patronage and contracts and leases and spoils," he says. "It's rare that the people of Illinois have an independent voice, and I count that as my greatest accomplishment."

In a move that still irks party regulars, Fitzgerald used a speech on the Senate floor to lump Hastert into former Gov. George Ryan's political combine. Fitzgerald suggests the distance between Hastert and him is "more on his part than on mine" and adds the distance seems to have evolved from Hastert's desire to influence the U.S. attorney appointments. A Hastert aide disputes both notions.

Having underwritten most of his campaign — and having declined to seek re-election — Fitzgerald can afford to criticize his party. Of the \$14.8 million the former banker spent on his 1998 campaign, nearly \$12 million was his own money, according to data collected by the Federal Election Commission.

Fitzgerald insists that's not necessarily the cost of political independence, but acknowledges he enjoys a certain freedom from special interests: "I do think that the fact that I wasn't beholden to a bunch of nefarious interests when I came into the Senate certainly made it easier to vote my own conscience."

Indeed, it's difficult to pigeonhole Fitzgerald based on his work in the Senate. Unusual for Republicans, for instance, he has a strong record of voting to protect the environment. And in blocking the O'Hare expansion legislation, he opposed Chicago-area corporate executives, traditional Republican allies. He earns moderate marks from major business groups.

"He's been nothing anyone expected," says Tripp Baird, director of Senate relations for the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. "When he ran for the Senate, everyone thought he was this archconservative. He got to the Senate and ended up being a pretty moderate senator. As he's leaving, he's hard to put in a box; whether you're of a conservative or liberal persuasion, I think it's a mixed bag."

The League of Conservation Voters gave him a 52 percent rating for the session of Congress that ended last year. That means he voted with the group a little more than half of the time. Ratings for Democrats on environmental issues tend to be much higher, but it's a strong rating for a Republican.

"A story that's told a little bit better than just the numbers of votes and the percentages," says Debbie Sease, legislative director at the Sierra Club, "is that he has stepped out on some issues, like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which were a very high priority for the environmental community, and I think a very high priority on the other side for the Bush Administration."

Fitzgerald earned an 82 percent cumulative rating from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and a 75 percent rating for the last Congress from the National Association of Manufacturers.

At home, Fitzgerald managed to shake up the political establishment by recommending the federal prosecutors and obstructing the O'Hare deal.

He tapped hard-charging prosecutors to lead Illinois' three federal court

At home, Fitzgerald managed to shake up the political establishment by recommending the federal prosecutors and obstructing the O'Hare deal.

districts. Patrick Fitzgerald (no relation to the senator), the U.S. attorney for the Chicago-based northern district, took office in 2001. He has continued the five-year federal Operation Safe Road investigation that has produced 56 convictions, including Ryan's campaign committee and his chief of staff when he was secretary of state.

Blocking the expansion plan could top Fitzgerald's legacy. The legislation would have codified a deal between Ryan and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, who controls the airport. Fitzgerald says his opposition to the plan stemmed from his belief that expansion was designed to quash development of a third airport in the Chicago area.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, a Springfield Democrat who spearheaded the plan in Congress, echoes GOP regulars in saying Fitzgerald's delivery hurt his credibility. "On a personal level, I've tried to separate our differences on issues, even our difference on O'Hare, and I've always tried to find a way to open up a line of communication," he says. "But I have to be very candid: That experience over the O'Hare filibuster took its toll."

Durbin says Fitzgerald reneged on a deal to permit a vote on the expansion legislation. He says it was clear to him, through Fitzgerald's objections, that the Republican would block the vote with a filibuster. Fitzgerald responds that he did not, in fact, intend to block the expansion measure, and that he would have prevailed had it been subjected to a vote.

Fitzgerald stood alone on other issues. In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, he was the only senator to vote against a \$15 billion bailout for the ailing airline industry. He argues they should have been compensated just for losses

sustained in the few days the federal government ordered airports shuttered. Subsequent to the attacks, which sacked an already slumping economy and devastated the airline industry, Illinois-based United Airlines declared bankruptcy. Texas-based American Airlines, the other dominant carrier at O'Hare, threatened to do so, but in April that company reached a cost-saving deal with its employee unions.

Fitzgerald takes credit, though, for saving United and American, the nation's two largest passenger carriers, from greater financial distress. Had Congress moved forward on the expansion plan, he says, those companies would have had to agree to \$400 million a year each in debt service on bonds to pay for it. "United and American would have no hope of reorganizing. American would be in bankruptcy and have no hope of getting out."

American spokeswoman Mary Frances Fagan responds that Fitzgerald misunderstands the airline industry, and the structure of the expansion deal. "Here's the problem: We don't need him," she says. "We have a governor who is a Democrat."

Gov. Rod Blagojevich, the Democrat she speaks of, has pledged to support an effort to modify state law, rather than federal law, to effect the agreement. Legislation was expected to move at the Statehouse late in the spring session.

Illinois GOP leaders are reluctant to engage in a dialogue with Fitzgerald. Judy Baar Topinka, the state treasurer and state party chair, and Bob Kjellander, the state's GOP national committeeman, declined to respond to Fitzgerald's strikes at the party, or the poll results.

Yet it's clear Fitzgerald would not enjoy their support in the next election. He probably would be forced to spend another small fortune, as he did in 1998. He says he'd be happy to spend the cash in the interest of public service, and he downplays the obvious disadvantage posed by lack of support from the party.

As for tension with Hastert, Fitzgerald balks at any suggestion that it motivated his decision to retire. "The polling we released showed that most people don't know who he is." □

Aaron Chambers can be reached at statehousebureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

Legi Checklist

The General Assembly sent Gov. Rod Blagojevich a \$52 billion budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The governor's first budget is designed to close an estimated \$5 billion deficit by raising taxes on the most profitable riverboats, raising liquor license fees, decompiling Illinois from the federal estate tax, which is being phased out, and selling off such state properties as the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago and the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority building in Downers Grove. It includes one-time transfers and fee increases.

The legislature sent 676 additional measures to the governor. Here are the highlights.



Telecommunications

SBC Communications, which controls 80 percent of Illinois' phone network, can double the rates it charges competitors to lease its lines. Blagojevich signed this bill hours after it reached his desk, directing the Illinois Commerce Commission to change the formula. SBC wants the wholesale rate to increase from \$12.38 to \$21.40 per line per month.

Proponents said this would keep jobs in Illinois. Opponents said it would dispel competition and drive up phone rates. SBC competitors AT&T and MCI, which benefit from lower lease rates, challenged the new law in federal court in Chicago.

SBC's clout, demonstrated by the speed at which the General Assembly and the governor embraced the bill — four days from introduction to law — left even seasoned lobbyists and legislators marveling. SBC's lobbying team was led by William Daley, the company's president and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's brother.

The Illinois Commerce Commission agreed to allow SBC to enter the long-distance phone service market. SBC must now apply to the Federal Communications Commission. A decision should be reached some time in the fall.



O'Hare

Blagojevich vowed to sign legislation giving Chicago enhanced quick-take

authority to seize suburban land around O'Hare International Airport — seizure that Mayor Daley argues is necessary to expand the airport he controls. The measure would suspend the governor's veto power over runway locations unless their placement veers substantially from the city's expansion plan. It does not fuel development of an airport near Peotone, or reopen Chicago's Meigs Field.



Gambling

Riverboat casinos with more than 2.3 million annual visitors would raise their admission fee from \$3 to \$5 a person, and boats would be taxed at 70 percent on receipts over \$250 million, as part of a plan designed to increase the state's gaming revenue by \$200 million annually. Another measure would permit the state to operate the 10th casino license, which is tied up in court, if the state could earn more tax revenue from a casino under state control. Boats on the Mississippi River also would be permitted to move five miles inland to another waterway.

Neither chamber approved legislation to increase the number of positions on the riverboats, put slots at racetracks or legalize video poker (see *Illinois Issues*, March, page 6).



Death penalty

A much-anticipated death penalty reform package would allow the state Supreme Court to overturn death sentences it finds "fundamentally unjust," require hearings on the credibility of testimony from so-called jailhouse snitches and define mental retardation as having an IQ of 75 or lower. The measure would not reduce death eligibility factors. Investigators would be required to videotape or audiotape interrogations in murder cases (see May, page 6).



Prescription drugs

Senior citizens and the disabled could get prescription drugs at lower prices through a state-sponsored discount card. This measure would require participating pharmacies to give discounts on medication

and direct the state to negotiate the best deal on drugs (see May, page 19).



Charter schools

The governor signed a measure to allow 15 more charter schools in Chicago, and restore some collective bargaining rights to teachers (see March, page 8).



Boards and commissions

The governor could appoint members of several boards and commissions, as well as the executive directors of the Pollution Control Board, the Prisoner Review Board and the Illinois Industrial Commission. The measure, pushed by the governor, also specifies that board members would be full-time and could not have outside employment.



Tollways

The toll authority would get an inspector general, contracts could not be issued to family of authority members and liens could be placed on the property of toll cheats under a plan to reform that agency. By May 2004, the toll system also would be required to submit to the legislature a 20-year financial plan.



Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine, a highly addictive and dangerous illicit drug typically made from a common agricultural product, commanded policy-makers' attention. The drug known as the "poor man's cocaine" is becoming more popular in Illinois, particularly in rural communities where producers have easy access to anhydrous ammonia, a compound farmers use to inject nitrogen into soil.

Lawmakers took aim at clandestine meth laboratories, which pose an environmental and public safety hazard because of the volatile and contaminative nature of chemicals used to make the drug. Measures would require meth producers to pay for decontamination of lab sites and reimburse emergency response agencies for the cost of participating in an emergency response; double time in prison for cooking meth

near children; and provide a Class X felony offense punishable by six to 30 years in prison when an emergency first responder or a child is injured or killed due to contact with a lab.

Racial profiling

Cops would be required to record the race of motorists they stop. This measure would create a four-year study to determine whether racial profiling occurs, and require police officers to go through training on how to be sensitive to racial differences.

Minimum wage

The state's minimum wage would increase from \$5.15 to \$5.50 an hour in 2004 and to \$6.50 in 2005.

Tax credit

The state's Earned Income Tax Credit would be permanent and refundable if the credit is greater than a taxpayer's tax liability. Refund payments, however, would not be made unless the state has sufficient federal funds left from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant.

Education funding

School districts would use the Illinois Department of Human Services' low-income count, instead of census numbers, to determine eligibility for poverty grants. The new poverty count, based on enrollment numbers for programs such as Kid-Care, will direct more money per pupil to schools with greater concentrations of low-income pupils.

The education budget would raise the foundation level per pupil by \$250, from \$4,560 to \$4,810. It also would provide \$100.1 million that would benefit property-wealthy districts that stood to lose money as funds from special grants were shifted into the higher general state aid budget.

Measures to make education a continuing appropriation and change the state aid payment schedule to 22 payments instead of 24 died in committee (see April, page 14).

Higher education

Public universities would be required to keep a student's tuition level for four years (see page 14). Another measure would allow lawmakers to give two annual scholarships to students attending any public

university in the state; under current law, one of those recipients must go to a student attending the University of Illinois. A ban on General Assembly scholarships died in the House (see May 1996, page 22). Under a third measure, university budgets would be dictated by line-item, rather than lump sum (see February, page 19).

Open meetings

Public bodies would be required to audiotape or videotape closed sessions of public meetings. A judge could review that record in response to a complaint that the public body discussed in closed session prohibited topics, or if the tape potentially contained evidence needed in a criminal proceeding. Another measure would allow public bodies to hold closed sessions to discuss security procedures.

Public records

Park districts, forest preserves and conservation districts would not have to disclose, under the state Freedom of Information Act, identifying information of those who participate in their programs. Maps of utility locations, construction-related documents and building security assessments would be exempt from FOIA if the information could jeopardize public safety.

Courts

Lake and McHenry counties, which share a judicial circuit, would get separate circuits. The circuits serving Lake, McHenry and Will would be divided into subcircuits. Currently, Cook is the only county with subcircuits.

Juvenile justice

Misdemeanor criminal records could be sealed after three, or in some cases four, years with no other criminal charges, under a measure aimed at giving teenage offenders a second chance. Another measure would establish a pilot program to limit incarceration of juvenile offenders by establishing community programs instead. Another proposed pilot program would run at-risk juveniles through prison tours to discourage them from committing crimes.

Economic development

Local governments could establish banking development districts if the state

treasurer's office deems that area underserved by banks. Banks that enter would get property tax breaks.

Another measure would create a committee to help local governments apply for federal funds to establish public transit programs to help low-income residents get to work.

Spam

Senders of unsolicited e-mail, known as spam, would have to include in the subject lines of such e-mails the letters "ADV:" for advertisement. This measure would require such e-mails to include a toll-free telephone number or an e-mail address so recipients could request removal from the sender's mailing list.

Miscellaneous

The governor signed a measure banning the sale of the dietary supplement ephedra, making this state the first to ban the drug outright.

Other measures on the governor's desk would designate popcorn as Illinois' official snack food; permit syringes to be purchased without a prescription in an effort to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS through dirty needles; prohibit the sale and manufacture of mercury thermometers; level penalties on employers who knowingly fail to withhold child support payments; permit police to stop drivers for not wearing seatbelts; and permit hunters to shoot deer with handguns that are .30 caliber or larger.

Civil rights

The House approved a resolution to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but the Senate postponed a vote until the fall veto session.

Neither chamber voted on a measure to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Lawmakers extended the voting deadline to the veto session.

Wetlands

The state would protect 152,000 acres of isolated wetlands not protected by federal law, under a measure that passed the House (see April, page 8). The Senate postponed a vote until the fall on that measure, which would not pre-empt county regulations that already protect isolated wetlands.

Bethany K. Warner

Smallpox vaccination carries new warning

The Illinois Department of Public Health is again offering smallpox vaccinations to health workers. The program was put on hold in March after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced possible cardiac complications. The state's information packet to clinics now reflects the CDC's recommendations for those persons diagnosed as having a heart condition.

"The department's primary focus is the safety of those individuals who volunteer to be vaccinated," says Dr. Eric Whitaker, director of the public health agency. "With the addition of these new guidelines, potential volunteers will have more detailed information about the smallpox vaccine so they can make an informed decision."

Those already advised by the CDC against getting the smallpox vaccine include people with weakened immune systems, women who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, nursing mothers and people with eczema or certain other skin conditions. Added now are those diagnosed as having a heart condition, with or without symptoms. In addition, the state public health department advises individuals with diabetes not to get the smallpox vaccination.

As of mid-May, more than 200 Illinois public health and health care workers have received the vaccinations. Eight of those volunteers have had nonserious adverse reactions to the smallpox vaccinations, but no one has reported heart problems.

Beverly Scobell

Fish advisory: Watch what you eat

At the return of spring, many Illinoisans head out to the fishing hole to wet a line. But the Illinois Department of Public Health urges caution when eating the catch. Fish from some Illinois waters pose a culinary risk.

The department recently issued its annual consumption advisories, which expanded the list to include three new lakes and two new rivers.

Lake of the Hills in McHenry County, Midlothian Reservoir in Cook County and Monee Reservoir in Will County were added to the advisory list because of mercury levels. Sensitive populations — children under 15, pregnant or nursing women and women of childbearing age — should not eat largemouth bass from these bodies more than once a month.

Mercury can cause damage to the central nervous system of a fetus. And last year a general statewide advisory was issued for mercury because it was found to be far more dangerous than previously thought.

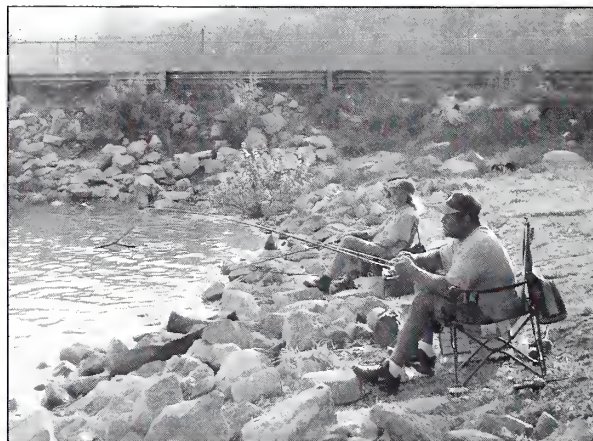
The DuPage River and Lake Fork Creek were added to the list because of dangerous levels of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB). Pregnant and nursing women and young children also are the most vulnerable to PCB poisoning. These individuals should eat no more than one meal a week of carp caught from the waterways.

One bright note in the report: The PCB levels in rainbow trout in Lake Michigan fell slightly, so the length of trout that falls under the advisory was increased from 17 to 22 inches.

Because PCBs are found in the fatty tissues and skin of fish, carefully trimming the skin and fat from fish before cooking can significantly reduce the amount of the chemical ingested. Mercury, however, accumulates in the muscle tissue.

The Illinois Fish Contamination Monitoring Program is a joint effort of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Nuclear Safety and Public Health.

Joseph Andrew Carrier



Fish from some Illinois waters pose a culinary risk.

Mosquito trackers

As summer brings outside activities, public health officials worry about ways to stretch extra-thin budgets to track the West Nile virus that hit this state harder than any other last year (see *Illinois Issues*, May 2003, page 8).

But 10 Illinois local health departments will get some help in the form of federal grants. The state Department of Public Health awarded a total of \$100,000 from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The grants were given to counties that had been marginally tested. Also considered were those areas where the highest number of

cases of West Nile were reported last year.

Local health departments will use the money to collect and test *Culex* mosquitoes, the common house mosquito and primary carrier of the West Nile and St. Louis encephalitis viruses. The surveillance data will allow health officials to keep the public informed about potential risk. Those health departments that received grants are the counties of Adams, Edgar, Fulton, Kane, Macoupin, McLean, Perry, Rock Island and St. Clair and the city of Springfield.

Beverly Scobell

SARS

Hysteria is its own health emergency

Severe acute respiratory syndrome hasn't gotten a hold in Illinois. As of mid-May, two people were probable for the virus and 14 others were suspected of having it, 12 in the suburbs and four downstate. None was hospitalized.

SARS, a flu-like illness, moved across the globe in a matter of weeks and quashed the economies of those cities hardest hit, but Dr. Eric Whitaker, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, doesn't believe the general public is at risk.

"All of these secondary transmissions occurred in close contact with someone who traveled to Asia. Local health authorities have been in touch with all the individuals with suspected SARS and their close contacts and have advised them on what precautions should be taken," he says.

Indeed, the hype appears to be feeding a fear greater than the impact of the disease. Though it spreads quickly, has no cure and is fatal in 6 percent of cases, most people recover with medical care. There have been nearly 7,500 cases worldwide, mainly in China, with 552 deaths as of mid-May. However, the World Health Organization reports that influenza, even in mild years, kills 250,000 people, with 10,000 to 40,000 of those in the United States. And every year malaria claims nearly a million people, most of those children.

In fact, in Illinois, the danger from SARS is more a matter of economic health than public health.

"It's hysteria," says Paul O'Connor, executive director of World Business Chicago and a former assistant director of the state public health agency. "The whole world has gone into a media-driven hysteria after 9-11."

However, Chicago could have found itself in the same crisis as Toronto, Ontario, he says. That Canadian city, just 430 miles from Illinois, reported nearly 400 cases of SARS and 23 deaths, which

caused the WHO to issue a travel advisory. That, in turn, caused a number of business and tourist cancellations.

That city estimates the loss to the local economy of just one cancellation of a 12,000-delegate convention at between \$15 million and \$20 million. That's comparable to the amount Chicago would lose for a convention that size, says Rachel Crippin-Clark, manager of public relations for the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau. The city hosts nearly 30 million business and leisure travelers each year, worth about \$9 billion in direct spending for the city.

Tourism evaporates with a travel advisory. The *Toronto Star* reports Ralph Hui, president of the Toronto Chinese Business Association, says travel agencies and gift shops in that city lost as much as 90 percent of business, restaurants up to 70 percent and herbalists, pharmacies and grocery stores up to 50 percent. A Toronto travel industry coalition estimates it will take two years to recover from the WHO advisory, which was lifted after six days.

Chicago's Department of Public Health closely monitors travelers at O'Hare International Airport, which is one of seven airports nationwide with officials from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on-site. "We're investigating any reports we get of symptoms in people who have traveled to affected countries," says Dr. John Wilhelm, the city's public health commissioner.

Working with the CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine, physicians meet planes coming directly or indirectly from mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam and Toronto and assess them for illness. When necessary, travelers are sent to a hospital for further tests. As of mid-May, Chicago did not have any cases of SARS, probable or suspected.

"We have done a good job in public health preparedness, at the state, city and regional level," says O'Connor. "But hysteria is its own health emergency."

Beverly Scobell

Workers' comp panel shake-up

Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration wasted little time in shaking up the Illinois Industrial Commission, the workers' compensation agency beset by backlogs and a reputation as a favored destination of patronage appointees.

Blagojevich quickly replaced the commission's chair, John Hallock Jr., a former Republican legislator. The governor tapped Dennis Ruth, who had been working as an arbitrator with the agency for nearly two years, to take Hallock's place.

Ruth, a St. Louis-area attorney, represented injured employees in workers' compensation cases before he started hearing such claims as an arbitrator in 2001. As chairman, Ruth enacted administrative changes designed to speed up cases. He hopes to rewrite some of the agency's rules.

Blagojevich also proposed a plan to change the way the commission is funded: a 1.5 percent tax on workers' compensation awards to cover the agency's costs.

The new assessment would raise enough money by June 2005 to nearly double the number of arbitrators, who serve as trial judges in the workers' compensation system. Ruth estimates that increasing the number of arbitrators from 22 to 40 could cut a year off the time it takes an average case to reach an initial decision, reducing the wait to 21 months.

Blagojevich also is trying to oust Diane Ford, who served as counsel to former Gov. George Ryan, as one of the seven commissioners at the agency. Blagojevich claims Ford engineered the last-minute placement of Ryan loyalists into secure state jobs.

A federal judge ruled that Ford had not been properly hired for the job. She may appeal the ruling, but Blagojevich has the authority to appoint two other commissioners to the agency.

Commissioners hear appeals of arbitrators' decisions; the chairman's role is primarily administrative.

Daniel C. Vock
Statehouse bureau
Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

REPORTS

Child welfare

The task force charged with reviewing the successes and failures of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services issued a number of recommendations for reform. The panel suggested the agency:

- make mental health services available to children who are or have been under the state's care;
- offer comprehensive substance abuse services to parents;
- improve methods of tracking post-adoptive cases and provide support services to adoptive parents and adopted children;
- establish a unit with the sole responsibility of reviewing and monitoring missing children's cases;
- develop a comprehensive program that prepares teens to exit the child welfare system.

PATERNITY RIGHTS

States move against fraud

The thought of a woman picking a man to be the legal father of her child based on the size of his pocketbook, whether or not he's the biological father, is unsettling. So attorney and activist Jeffrey Leving's allegation that most women in this circumstance lie to gain a man's money may seem outrageous.

Yet Illinois and several other states are taking an interest in so-called paternity fraud. As men facing paternity suits increasingly turn to DNA testing to show they're not biologically responsible, states have passed or are considering legislation permitting these men to disestablish paternity status and possibly negate child support obligations.

Six states — Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Ohio and Virginia — have such laws, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Ten states (Indiana falls into this

category, too) are considering them.

In Illinois, Leving, whose Chicago-based practice focuses on paternal rights, pushed a proposal this spring to make paternity fraud a Class A misdemeanor punishable by a year in prison. The measure would define the offense as knowingly and falsely accusing another of being the father of a child. Rep. William Delgado, a Chicago Democrat, is the sponsor.

"Unfortunately, due to the moral decay of our society, women and men have multiple sex partners," Leving says. "And when women become pregnant, often they pick the man with the deepest pockets to play the role of the father because that ensures the largest amount of child support."

Most public discourse with regard to DNA paternity testing has focused on the potential to free wronged men. And there's at least one Web site, www.paternityfraud.com, devoted to this issue.

But Christi Goodman, a national conference analyst, notes that the other side of the coin hasn't received as much attention: application of disestablishment laws when a child's legal father wants to remain the father but his paternity is challenged by an ex-wife who wants to cut off any contact with him or another man who believes he is the father.

"The issue is not black and white," she adds. "Some consideration needs to be given to social stability, the needs of children and the interests of states in a legal system that can be relied upon to adjudicate matters with some finality."

Still, the pendulum of law does appear to be swinging toward the interests of men. Leving calls that a positive development so long as the end result is balanced. "I don't think the pendulum should swing all the way because then you have gender bias in a different form," he says. "What I'm trying to do is apply balance so women and men are treated fairly and that way the children are best protected."

Aaron Chambers

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Getting there

Finding the cash to go to college is turning out to be almost as tough as attending the classes

by Bethany K. Warner

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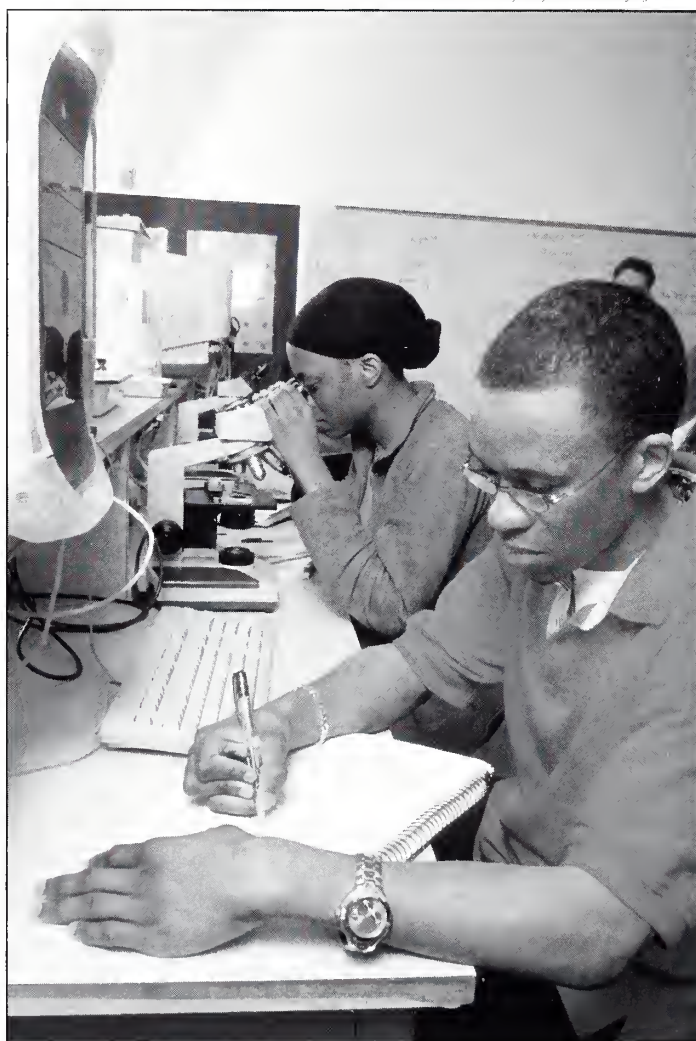
Ashley Hustava is candid. A decision about where she attends college may come down to cost.

The senior at Springfield's Southeast High School has been accepted at four schools. Now she's waiting to find out what financial aid and scholarships are available. Her family started putting money away for her education when she was little, but it's still not enough.

Hustava's dream is to go to Millikin University, a private school in Decatur, but she's looking to Southern Illinois University's Edwardsville campus or Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield as options. Her family's income of about \$41,000 is too high to qualify for federal grants, but the state chipped in \$2,000 toward her expenses.

The decision on financing her college education has caused several family arguments, Hustava says. Her mom favors Millikin; her dad wants her to attend a public university for a year or two to save money. Even less expensive — and the option she may have to choose — is attending community college her first two years. She could live at home and avoid room and board costs.

Across the country, college-bound high school students and their parents,



like the Hustavas, are experiencing "sticker shock" at the cost of higher education. Though private colleges and universities remain more expensive, the cost of attending a public university has increased at a faster pace over the past decade.

The Hustavas are fortunate in one

regard. Illinois is still among the states with the most affordable higher education. But soon it may no longer be able to make that claim. Illinois' higher education funding, including student aid, is dwindling, while tuition at Illinois' colleges and universities is rising. The result is that the gap between the cost of attending college and what Illinois families can manage to pay is widening. As that gap grows, so does concern about whether college will become unattainable for low- and lower-middle income students.

Consequently, education officials, along with law-makers and the governor, are wrestling with ways to rein in tuition costs and stabilize, if not close, the affordability gap. Foremost among the proposals is one that would guarantee a tuition rate through four years of college so that families like the Hustavas can plan ahead.

Illinois isn't alone in this. Other states are looking for

ways to limit tuition hikes in an effort to keep higher education affordable for students in all income brackets. But, for now, this state remains among those offering the most affordable higher education because of the need-based financial aid it offers its students.

In 2000, the National Center for

Public Policy and Higher Education gave Illinois an "A" in a nationwide report card on affordability. The centerpiece of the state's success is the Monetary Award Program. Enacted in 1957, the program provides need-based grants directly to students that can be used to pay for tuition and fees at either public or private universities in this state. Most of the grants go to students with family income under \$47,000.

But in 2002, Illinois' affordability grade dropped to a "B," primarily because of rising costs at private and community colleges. And the state's budget woes forced a \$38 million reduction in the amount appropriated for the Monetary Award Program. This meant that the maximum grants had to be reduced by 5 percent per recipient, and grants to fifth-year students had to be eliminated. But Larry Matejka, executive director of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, says even with the cuts the maximum grant available was \$4,720. The assistance commission gave out more than \$333 million in need-based aid for the 2002-2003 academic year.

Nevertheless, concern is growing that if the Monetary Award Program funding stagnates and costs continue to rise, Illinois may drop out of the ranks of states with the most affordable college education. Over the past decade, the total cost of attending a public university — tuition and fees, plus room, board and extra expenses — has risen 69.5 percent to more than \$11,000 in 2002, the Student Assistance Commission reports. Further, tuition and fees at seven of the state's 12 public universities are greater than the maximum grant for the Monetary Award Program. "We have done a better job in Illinois of keeping pace," Matejka says. "But even with our efforts, tuition and fees, books and supplies, room and board costs have all gone up faster than one, inflation, and two, availability of student grant aid."

And the commission concludes that over the past decade higher education has become least affordable for lower-middle income families, those earning between \$26,200 and \$46,870. That's because these families must contribute a greater share of the costs

of a college education before any need-based aid can be awarded. The cost that remains after the aid — the affordability gap — for those families has grown by almost \$1,300 between 1992 and 2002.

Families are fighting to cross the gap, though, because they realize that a college education is a prerequisite to many jobs. Studies show a college grad can net a return of more than \$1 million over a lifetime. "It's not a bad deal," says Sue Kleemann, director of research, planning and policy analysis at the commission. "The stock market doesn't give that kind of return."

Liz Moran, a sophomore at the University of Illinois at Springfield from southwest suburban Burbank, says her father always encouraged her and her brothers to go to college to have successful careers. Though she says her parents encouraged her to go to the school she thought would best fit her, Moran says she had to rule out schools that would have forced her parents to take out loans. As a high school senior she filled out applications for scholarships.

College students, and the schools they attend, are facing greater pressure these days because the state's share of higher education funding is shrinking. For the fiscal year that begins next month, Gov. Rod Blagojevich proposed \$102.7 million in cuts to higher education, bringing the total higher education budget to \$2.46 billion.

Therefore, colleges and universities are turning to tuition increases to fill gaps between state fiscal support and operational needs. Illinois isn't alone in this. "Nationwide, public higher education is less [state] funded, and there's a high correlation with increases in tuition," says Salme Steinberg, president of Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. Tuition there has increased 5 percent for next year, higher than the 3.1 percent to 3.6 percent it enacted in recent years.

Maintaining affordability in higher education — especially for lower-middle income families — is stirring debate. The governor is keen on capping tuition increases to 5 percent and favors a tuition cost guarantee.

At press time, the cost guarantee idea, referred to as "truth-in-tuition,"

Some colleges and universities are turning to tuition increases to fill gaps between operational needs and state fiscal support. Illinois isn't alone in this either.

was working its way through the legislature. Two bills, sponsored by Sen. Larry Walsh, an Elwood Democrat, and Rep. Kevin Joyce, a Chicago Democrat, would lock in the rate of tuition and fees a student pays as a freshman for four years of continuous enrollment. "If the governor's plan goes into effect and the locked-in tuition plan also takes effect, that would be the ultimate plan for families," says Walsh.

In tandem, these plans could stabilize costs for parents, but they could prove to be a nightmare for the universities. Officials at several of the state's public institutions and the Board of Higher Education say they worry that limiting tuition increases to 5 percent will strip schools of the resources they need to provide quality education.

"It's imprudent to restrict universities' options with tuition," says Chet Gardner, vice president for academic affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Tuition decisions, he says, should be left to the boards of trustees who are more familiar with the universities' needs.

In fact, Sen. Steven Rauschenberger, an Elgin Republican and the Senate GOP's chief budget negotiator, calls the legislative push to hold down tuition a purely political move. "We're in no

place to order universities to cap or manage their tuition," he says. "We ought to muck as little as possible in higher education finance until we're a more stable partner." He notes that over the past two fiscal years, university budgets were cut after appropriations were made, a move that he dubs "disingenuous."

Some universities already offer a guaranteed rate of tuition or programs to help students prepare for rising costs. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale offers tuition projections to help students and families plan. Western Illinois University in Macomb has had a guaranteed tuition program in place since fall 1999. The legislative truth-in-tuition proposals were modeled after Western's plan. And it's a plan some universities can accept. Such a guarantee, says Gardner, "enhances affordability because you can plan — the tuition is going to stay fixed."

That solution is one that's also favored by a joint committee of the Board of Higher Education and the Student Assistance Commission, which is studying the affordability issue. The committee is expected to release its findings and recommendations in late summer. It is proposing 17 ways to lower college costs, assist low-income students and keep the overall cost of higher education affordable. The report advocates predictable tuition, such as a rate guarantee, and increases in funding to the Monetary Award Program to provide more significant awards to more students.

"If we're going to let tuition rise," Rauschenberger says, "we ought to address that in the Monetary Award Program and make sure people on the edge can afford it."

The committee advocates increasing the funding for the monetary awards so that they meet or exceed tuition and fees. In addition, boosting funding could allow the commission to change the award formula to provide larger grants to lower-middle income students. Even if the \$38 million in cuts from last year were restored, Matejka says that the program would still lag behind because of cost increases in higher education. An increase in

funding above the \$38 million restoration could permit full funding of awards or more awards to more students.

Having to shoulder student loans is already a reality for many Illinoisans. Hustava is savvy about interest rates for loans and how repayment works after graduation. "It's so hard," she says. "You want a good education, but you don't want to be paying off loans until you're 50." By the time she graduates from college in the spring of 2007, she expects to be \$17,000 in debt. Hustava's mother, Sheila, is concerned about her daughter starting out with that much debt. She worries that if Ashley doesn't get a good job after graduation, the monthly loan payments will be difficult to make.

Still, for an increasing number of students, that is an option. The interest on most such loans is subsidized by the state or federal government until six months after a student graduates. And the College Board, a national not-for-profit organization that assists students with college choice and financing information, reports that nationally the number of borrowers of subsidized loans has increased 443 percent since 1994, from 264,000 to an estimated 1.4 million for the 2001-02 school year.

A survey of borrowers found that the loans were the way these students made college affordable, says Sandy Baum, a visiting scholar with the College Board and professor of economics at Skidmore College in Sarasota Springs, N.Y. But the trend toward reduced state support is worrisome because it widens the affordability gap. "If more and more need to borrow to fill the gap, it will reduce access," she says.

The Student Assistance Commission's Kleemann argues, too, that lower-income families are more hesitant to borrow large sums to finance higher education.

Beyond taking out loans, more students are working while in school to pay for their education. The commission reports that in 1998, 43 percent of Monetary Award Program grant recipients worked an average of 15 to 33 hours a week. By 2002, 55 percent were working at least 21 hours a week

and 37 percent were working more than 31 hours. National data shows that students who work more report they have less access to the classes they need and to such educational services as libraries. And their grades can suffer.

Laura Petrea, a sophomore at the University of Illinois' Springfield campus, has been able to finance her education through financial aid and scholarships, which means she doesn't need to work while attending college. Not working, Petrea says, has helped the Marion resident "focus on my studies and not how to pay for my studies." But her experience is atypical among her classmates, most of whom must work to meet the cost of tuition and books.

Lawmakers concede that if the affordability gap isn't closed, or at least narrowed, the consequences could be dramatic: Lower-income students could simply choose not to enroll in college.

National statistics from the U.S. Department of Education already show that low-income students are less likely to go to college after high school. Because of financial burdens, 22 percent of college-qualified low-income students do not enroll in any postsecondary education. Sixteen percent of lower-middle income students do not enroll. If less aid is available, more of these students will either drop out or not enroll. "If you don't finance these people properly," says Brian Fitzgerald, staff director of the Congressional Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid, "they're not going to persist."

Though there's plenty of concern about the affordability of post-secondary education for lower- and lower-middle income families, most observers say the problem can be corrected before cost barriers become insurmountable.

"There is affordability in Illinois higher education," Matejka says. "What our job is, is to try to keep it affordable and try to keep students from having to borrow huge amounts of money." But, he concedes, "to keep it affordable, a student is going to have to borrow and probably work at the same time." □

A future mortgaged

The governor's pension bonding plan counts on future investment income. That's always risky

by Aaron Chambers

Imagine getting a home equity loan for \$100,000, spending \$27,000 of it on a new car and investing the rest — then counting on the interest earned to cover the interest paid, as well as the cost of the car. That's the essence of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's \$10 billion pension bonding plan, which became law in April.

This isn't a new idea. Buying and selling in separate financial markets in order to profit from the difference in rates is called an arbitrage. It's commonly used by banks, which invest their customers' money for a higher rate of return than they pay on, say, checking or savings accounts.

In recent years, it also has become popular among municipal governments seeking to cover all or a portion of their pension systems' unfunded liabilities — the difference between assets and what would be necessary to pay all benefits accrued by a system's members. By selling bonds and dumping the proceeds into their pension funds, municipalities trade the cost of required contributions to their systems for the cost of debt service on the bonds. And, as long as their investments outperform the cost of their loans, the pension funds gain.

But counting on the performance of any investment is risky. When the market slumps, as it did during the last two years, an arbitrage can fail; there's a chance the rate of return on the investment could be less than the cost of the loan. Pension bonding plans can put governments on the hook for additional, unforeseen contributions to their systems — while they continue to pay the debt service on the bonds.

This state's pension bonding plan,

which doubles the state's total bonded indebtedness and constitutes the largest such scheme to date, is no exception to the rule. And there's an additional twist that heightens the risk. Rather than realize gains as they occur, the administration is realizing, and spending, the projected 30-year gain in the first year of the plan. Like the homeowner who spent 27 percent of an equity loan for a car, the plan dictates that some 27 percent of the bond proceeds be spent immediately.

Budget officials intend to sell \$10 billion in bonds by the end of fiscal year 2004. Most of the immediate spending, \$2.16 billion, is earmarked for required contributions to the retirement systems during fiscal years 2003 and 2004. By using dollars generated from the sale of bonds to make these contributions, the state will free up dollars in the General Revenue Fund, the state's main checking account, for those fiscal years.

This component of the plan was key to balancing the governor's first budget. By offsetting the retirement obligation, the plan helps reduce a projected \$5 billion deficit. And that was the General Assembly's central consideration in approving it.

The risk comes in the long-term. In addition to \$2.16 billion for immediate pension contributions, the administration intends to reserve roughly \$500 million from the proceeds for debt service during the first year. The new law permits this. Statute allows the state to spend up to \$50 million of those proceeds on fees paid to firms that handle the transactions, though budget officials argue those costs will not reach the cap.

The remaining sum, about \$7.3 billion, will be invested in the state's five pension systems in an effort to reduce unfunded liabilities. Over the course of 30 years, the state's required annual contribution to those systems will be reduced by the amount of debt service paid each year on the bonds. The plan, therefore, is designed to have a neutral effect on the General Revenue Fund.

The state's five funds, which cover pension obligations to state and university workers, teachers, judges and legislators, were 53.5 percent funded at the end of fiscal year 2002. They had combined assets of \$40.3 billion against liabilities of \$75.2 billion. Under a law implemented in 1996, those systems must be 90 percent funded by 2045. To accomplish this goal, the state is required to contribute each year to cover annual accrued liabilities and to reduce total unfunded liabilities.

While the arbitrage will permit the state to aggressively reduce its unfunded pension liabilities in the short term, it's not clear whether the five funds will be left in substantially better shape after the 30 years than they would have been under the previous scheme. If the gain simply cancels out initial contribution spending, then the funds would have the same unfunded liabilities as they otherwise would have.

Still, most officials at the Statehouse are focused on the short-term budget relief allowed by the plan, not whether the arbitrage will enhance the pension funds' values over the long term.

"[The plan] generates about a \$2 billion positive cash flow for us this year, in the year that we have a \$5 billion hole," says Rep. Gary Hannig of

Litchfield, chief budget negotiator for the House Democrats. "In a perfect world I think we would have done this thing, but we would not have withdrawn the \$2 billion. We'd have left it in there, and we would have let it percolate through, and we'd have let the 8.5 percent growth continue and we would have been significantly better off."

The pension bonding model assumes the state will pay an average of 6 percent in interest over 30 years on the bonds, and earn an average compounded interest rate of 8.5 percent on the additional investment. The projected net gain — the projected value of the investment in 30 years minus the projected cost of the loan — should be "in excess of \$2 billion," says Blagojevich's Budget Director John Filan.

The \$2 billion would roughly cover the immediate contributions to the pension systems. It's not clear whether the estimated \$500 million for debt service during the first year would be accepted as a loss.

Blagojevich's budget office has not provided a more detailed accounting of their projections. But, according to Joseph Starshak, a partner at Chicago-based investment firm Starshak Welnhof & Co. who specializes in municipal finance, the \$7.3 billion investment will be worth \$84.3 billion after 30 years if it earns an average compounded interest rate of 8.5 percent. Meanwhile, he projects the state will pay \$21.9 billion in debt service, including principal and interest, on \$10 billion worth of 30-year bonds sold at an average 6 percent rate of interest. That would constitute a present value net gain of \$62.4 billion. But the investment projection assumes no withdrawals from the investment for pension obligations, and that is unlikely.

There are few critics. Three of the four legislative leaders — Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and House Speaker Michael Madigan, both Chicago Democrats, and House Minority Leader Tom Cross, an Oswego Republican — supported it when it was presented to lawmakers. Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson, a Greenville Republican, was opposed.

Sen. Steve Rauschenberger of Elgin, chief budget negotiator for Watson's

caucus, says his chief concern is that Blagojevich intends to realize and spend immediately the expected arbitrage gain of more than \$2 billion. "It is too risky to spend your profits in year one," he says. In fact, Rauschenberger suggests the elaborate scheme was designed primarily to shelter the nascent administration from having to make politically unpopular decisions to balance the budget. "It is just risking an awful lot and taking your gains all in the first year and spending it because you don't want to make hard decisions this year."

For their part, administration officials argue the arbitrage is in fact designed to buttress the pension funds over the long haul. The governor likens it to refinancing a home in order to take advantage of a lower interest rate. And his deputies argue it would be irresponsible not to take advantage of the current low rates.

The administration intends to sell the bonds in three or four installments over the next year. Each installment, called a tranche, is expected to total \$2 billion to \$3 billion. The first was scheduled to be sold as early as last month.

Filan says there are varying opinions among investment bankers on how many installments will be necessary, and he adds that the first tranche could be larger than expected. "Until you get out there and know what supply the market demands, you don't know." In any case, he hopes the bonds are sold quickly to capitalize on historically low interest rates.

Budget officials also envision a diverse portfolio of bonds, which will make them more attractive to a broader range of investors in the international bond buying community. They expect maturation periods will range from 11 years to 30 years (the maximum allowed by law), with the average bond life being 24 years.

In addition, Filan wants the option of selling variable rate bonds. This would require legislative approval, and the administration was aiming to secure this before the end of spring session.

Variable rate bonds can be sold at a much lower interest rate than fixed rate bonds, but they can subject the state to more risk because those rates fluctuate. As a result, this aspect of the plan is controversial. The Civic Federation, a

Chicago-based municipal tax policy watchdog, supports the move. Other analysts express concern.

Filan plays down worries. He says variable rate bonds sold by the state would be couched in fixed rate bonds to minimize the state's exposure to risk — an instrument he refers to as a hedge. And here's one possibility for how this might work. Starshak, the investment banker, suggests the state could establish a reserve fund to accept savings incurred by paying a lower interest rate on variable rate bonds. Should the rate on those bonds rise, those funds would cushion fiscal impact on the state.

Filan does say that only a small portion of the bond portfolio should be variable rate. "You don't make the whole issue variable rate," he says. "Typically, maybe 10, 15, 20 percent of a bond portfolio may be variable rate."

The most important point, he argues, is having the authority to sell them. That, he says, increases the state's negotiating power with fixed rate bond buyers. "When people out there want your fixed rate bonds, if they know that the only way you can sell is fixed rate bonds, then as a buyer they know they're the only market in town," he says. "That strengthens their negotiating position. But if they're a buyer and they know you have an alternative market, meaning variable rate, if you don't like their price, that helps them bring their price down."

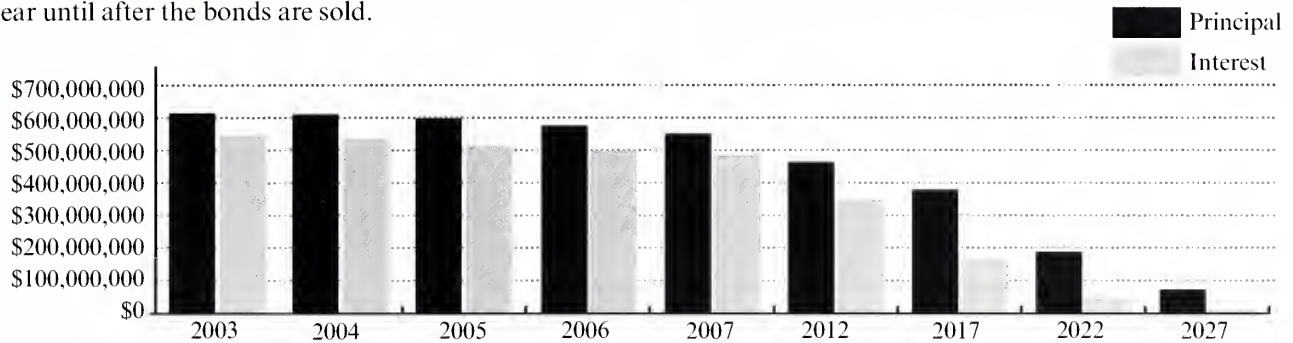
Filan says the assumption that the proceeds from the sales, when invested, will earn an average compounded interest rate of 8.5 percent is reasonable when viewed in light of returns earned by the pension funds over the last 20 years. He disputes criticism that this is an unfair measure because the late 1990s boom, which produced extraordinary gains for investors, is largely considered an anomaly. "You can pick good years and bad years and make an argument one way or another, but these are really all long-term portfolios and it's that horizon that counts."

In fact, the compounded annual rate of return for the state employees, judges and General Assembly retirement funds was above 8.5 percent during most of that 20-year period, according to figures provided by the Illinois Pension Laws Commission, which tracks laws and

Illinois' bond debt

Illinois had \$9.54 billion in outstanding direct obligation bonds — general obligation and special obligation — at the end of fiscal year 2002. Gov. Rod Blagojevich's plan to sell \$10 billion in bonds over the next year, and invest most of the proceeds in state pension systems, will double that debt.

The following figures, provided by the state comptroller's office, reflect required annual service for bonds in place before the governor's plan. Additional obligations will be spread on top of existing ones, but the exact schedule will not be clear until after the bonds are sold.



practices relative to public pensions. From fiscal years 1983 to 1992, they averaged 8.6 percent, and from fiscal years 1993 to 2002 they averaged 12.6 percent.

Yet in dollar terms the five funds sustained substantial losses during the recent market downturn. During fiscal years 2001 and 2002, they collectively lost \$4.6 billion on their investments, according to the commission. The commission also reports unfunded liabilities in the five funds grew by almost \$18 billion from fiscal years 1995 to 2002, due mostly to lower-than-assumed state contributions, lower-than-assumed investment returns and benefit increases.

New Jersey's pension fund took even greater losses. That state implemented a \$2.8 billion pension bonding plan in 1997, and it fell victim to bad timing when the market turned sour. The pension fund peaked at \$83 billion in June 2000, according to the state's Department of the Treasury, but it's now worth only \$55 billion. Other governments that sold pension obligation bonds in the late 1990s also lost money in the recent downturn, according to Parry Young, a director in the public finance department of Standard & Poor's. "They have not even recovered the cost of pension obligation bonds," he says.

When investments in those funds underperform, the government sponsor can be on the line to contribute addi-

tional dollars toward reduction of unfunded liability on top of the cost of the bonds. Under Illinois' previous law, the state would have this responsibility to make up a loss in the funds. The distinction with the new law, though, is that the state would simultaneously be under the obligation to service the bonds. "When you don't meet your assumed investment return, you may be incurring new unfunded actuarial liabilities and your contribution rates will be going up," Young says. "So that constrains your financial flexibility."

At least during the initial years, the Blagojevich plan appears to minimize the potential for additional financial responsibility. Hannig and Rauschenberger interpret certain language in the new law as a hold-harmless provision absolving the state from liability should the pension funds underperform.

"If they have some losses in the early part of the process, this sort of locks out the pension systems from asking the state to make up those differences," Hannig says. "So it gives us on this side a little bit of breathing room. But clearly we are still liable as we go forward. So if they have three or four bad years, while this language may relieve us from having to make the payments, eventually those birds will come home to roost — as they will anyway if the pension system does a lousy job."

There are other concerns. Though Illinois is obligated by law to make minimum payments to its pension funds

each year, there is flexibility inherent in meeting expectations within a statutory formula that isn't available when it comes to paying debt service on bonds.

As for Illinois' bonded indebtedness, there is limited concern among analysts that adding \$10 billion could hurt the state's credit rating, especially in light of the state's other fiscal challenges. Illinois had \$9.54 billion in direct bond obligations at the end of fiscal year 2002, according to the state comptroller's office. Blagojevich's plan will more than double that obligation. Last month, Moody's Investors Service reduced the state's credit rating for long-term debt, while Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings warned they may downgrade their ratings for the state. This could make bonding more expensive.

Still, credit analysts on Wall Street stress that they review a state's entire budgetary picture when determining a rating. Timothy Blake, a senior analyst at Moody's, says the company's chief considerations were the state's increased unfunded pension liability and declining general revenues. "Not only do you have this long-term pension issue," he says, "but the near-term budget condition of the state is quite strained."

Blagojevich's plan has 30 years to perform. And it could take that long to know whether it's worth the risk. This much is clear, though: The plan helped reconcile the state budget for one more year. □

The advocate is in

Illinois' new top doc is known more for his skill at reaching underserved communities than his political savvy

by Stephanie Zimmermann
Photographs by Jon Randolph



Dr. Eric Whitaker

When Dr. Eric Whitaker got a call from the governor's office, it didn't occur to him he was being considered to head the state Department of Public Health. Whitaker, an attending physician at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital in Chicago, the former Cook County

Hospital, figured someone wanted his resume for yet another advisory panel. But then the governor's office called back to set up an interview. "I said, 'Interview for what?'" Whitaker recalls, laughing. "They said, 'For the directorship.'"

Gov. Rod Blagojevich apparently liked

what he saw in the innovative, personable and young — he turned 38 last month — internist known for his ability to reach those who are overlooked by the medical establishment. He asked Whitaker to head a state agency that is increasingly in the public eye. With severe acute

respiratory syndrome, homeland security preparations and the West Nile virus season upon us, Whitaker joins the agency at one of its busiest times.

But those who know Whitaker say he's up to those tasks — and more.

"The state's Department of Public Health has an opportunity to broaden its vision and deal with issues that we may not have dealt with before," says Dr. Ruth Rothstein, director of Stroger Hospital. "He's young and ambitious and bright, and will do, I think, a terrific job."

While Whitaker's resume may lack political connections, it includes a lengthy list of academic and career achievements. Raised on Chicago's South Side by a father who drove a Butternut Bread truck and a mother who worked as a nurse, Whitaker earned a bachelor's degree from Grinnell College in Iowa, a medical degree from the University of Chicago and a master's degree in public health from Harvard University. He also headed the 30,000-member American Medical Student Association. He completed his residency in primary care and internal medicine at San Francisco General Hospital, where he worked with AIDS patients at the height of the epidemic there.

Throughout his training, and after he returned to Chicago as an internist, Whitaker's attention kept going back to vulnerable, underserved populations — people who rarely seek or receive medical care. Maybe it was because he was the only African-American student in his medical school class at the University of Chicago. Maybe it was because the Woodlawn neighborhood, where he was born and where his grandparents still live, had drifted into painful neglect.

But Whitaker also was troubled by statistics that show black men have higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and certain types of cancer than whites, and that in Chicago the average life expectancy for a white man is about 73, yet for black men in Woodlawn it's closer to 58.

Whitaker thought about how to get these African-American men into the health care system. He approached it as a marketing problem, asking them why

they avoid doctors. What he heard made sense in the context of their lives: They believe doctors are unlike them and won't respect them. They worry that seeing a doctor will make them seem weak — a risk they can't take in a tough neighborhood. They are so preoccupied with unemployment and crime that preventive health is low on their priority lists.

So Whitaker decided to hook them with something less foreign: a barber-shop. Cook County's Woodlawn Adult Health Center provided some space and, in 1998, Project Brotherhood was born.

Whitaker's instincts were right. Project Brotherhood offers free haircuts, chicken dinners and camaraderie, and sneaks in free check-ups and health programs. It is a hit. Today, more than 1,000 men from the blighted Woodlawn neighborhood and beyond use Project Brotherhood's services each year.

In 2000, the program received the highest honor of the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems. And just before he was offered the state directorship, Whitaker won a prestigious award and a \$300,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to study men who have come through Project Brotherhood's "manhood development" course.

Whitaker says the model used to create Project Brotherhood — seeing what the people need rather than giving them a "top-down" program — could be used with other underserved Illinois populations, whether they are Latinos, women or rural folks. He envisions a more active state health department. Even with Illinois' recent financial belt-tightening — next fiscal year's public health budget proposal of \$319.9 million is down from this year's — he believes there are low-cost ways to reach people. "The big piece for me is the community aspect of it," Whitaker says. "Rather than just be reactive to the emergent disease of the day, we'll be more proactive than we have in the past."

But diseases beyond his control also will vie for Whitaker's time. He's already planning an informational push about West Nile virus, which

While Eric Whitaker's resume may lack political connections, it includes a lengthy list of academic and career achievements.

killed 63 and sickened more than 800 in Illinois last year, the highest numbers for any state. "We are hoping for the best," he says, "but planning for the worst."

He's keeping a watchful eye but not panicking about SARS, which has been sweeping through parts of Asia but hasn't made significant inroads in the United States. "I think [the fear] is totally out of proportion to the risk."

Then there are myriad health issues related to homeland security, such as dealing with a possible biological weapons attack, learning how to better communicate with the public and implementing a voluntary smallpox vaccine program for medical providers.

"He'll study a situation and make improvements to it, but is savvy enough to know that you can't go into a situation where there are career workers and make all sorts of changes in a day," says Dr. Bill McDade, an anesthesiologist, researcher and associate dean for multicultural affairs at the University of Chicago's medical school, who describes Whitaker as exceptionally bright. "Eric is very capable. [Former Director] John Lumpkin was a great guy, but I think Eric has the potential to do things that John wouldn't have thought of," McDade says.

McDade knows Whitaker as well as anyone. The two met when McDade was a 19-year-old whiz kid already enrolled at the University of Chicago's

medical school and Whitaker was a high school junior attending a program for kids interested in medical careers. Whitaker still remembers seeing McDade bent over a microscope, researching sickle cell disease. He thought that was pretty cool.

A few years later, when Whitaker was in University of Chicago's medical school and McDade was working on his doctorate, McDade again crossed paths with Whitaker, who was the only African-American student in his class. "Eric was having a hard time adjusting to medical school," McDade remembers. White classmates would readily ask Whitaker to play basketball but forgot to call when it was time to form study groups. "He really felt the pain in that," McDade says.

When one of McDade's two roommates moved out, he asked Whitaker if he wanted to take his place. Whitaker, a studious guy whose voracious reading masked a fun-loving personality, moved into the tiny apartment at 57th and Drexel, happy to have some support. His whole outlook changed, McDade says.

He tried to convince Whitaker he needed to get involved with such mainstream medical organizations as the American Medical Association. Young black doctors are needed in those groups, McDade reminded him, to keep attention on the problems faced by impoverished, isolated communities.

Whitaker eventually heeded that advice. While at Harvard, he headed the national American Medical Student Association. He testified before Congress twice and served on governmental advisory committees. Later, when Project Brotherhood was getting off the ground, he coaxed Cook County and federal officials into

Clinic draws wary patients

It's 5 p.m. on a Thursday and men are streaming into the Project Brotherhood clinic, walking past vacant lots and boarded-up buildings, lured by free haircuts, chicken and pizza but in need of something more.

Usually most African-American men have scant contact with the traditional medical world. But once through this clinic's door, the wariness evaporates. The doctors are young, male and black — just like the patients.

"They get surprised that I get stopped by the police [just like them] and that I get followed around Marshall Field's, too," says Dr. Bonnie Thomas Jr., an African-American man who is co-director of the once-a-week program on Chicago's South Side. "The idea is that we remove all the barriers."

Many nights as many as 60 men visit. Staffers transform part of the Woodlawn Adult Health Center into a functioning barbershop complete with chair and cape. But as the clippers whir and hair falls, another group in an adjacent room is gathered for a serious talk about such problems as asthma or parenting. Down the hall are examination rooms where clients can talk to a doctor privately.

Project Brotherhood, launched in 1998, is due in large part to the efforts of Dr. Eric Whitaker, the new Illinois Department of Public Health director. Whitaker says the "black male environment" allows people who've been outside the system to feel they can participate.

Donald McDaniels, another co-director, says the approach is working. He believes it will work for Whitaker, too, in his new position. "I think that's what's missing in public health," McDaniels says. "He's going to be attentive to what their needs are."

Stephanie Zimmermann



Dr. Eric Whitaker

history with his natural people skills and ability to reach a common ground.

At the same time, it's unlikely he will be content to shuffle papers at the Thompson Center. He took a pay cut with his new \$127,600 salary because he thinks he can make a difference. "He's definitely not going to be a desk guy," says Dr. Bonnie Thomas, co-director of Project Brotherhood. "He's going to be out there."

In his private life, Whitaker tries to live healthfully. He still plays basketball regularly, doesn't smoke and eats the healthy food urged upon him by his wife, Dr. Cheryl Rucker-Whitaker, an assistant professor of preventive medicine at Chicago's Rush Medical College, whose research focuses on chronic diseases affecting African-American women. They have a 2-year-old son, Caleb.

When Gov. Blagojevich announced that Whitaker was his choice for the post, he referred to "the kind of commitment and compassion I wanted in my public health director."

On a recent Thursday night that commitment was evident. After spending a full day with his agency staff, Whitaker once again made the trip to Woodlawn, a world away from bureaucrats and politicians.

It was Project Brotherhood night, and, without any fanfare, he entered the building and began seeing his patients. □

Stephanie Zimmermann is a reporter at the Chicago Sun-Times. Her most recent story for Illinois Issues, which focused on some of the state's most impoverished communities, appeared in March.

The Future of Life

Review essay & photographs
by Joseph Andrew Carrier

Last month, Illinois farmers planted an estimated 11.3 million acres of corn and 10.4 million acres of soybeans. Many used machines that seeded 36 rows at a time, the bins loaded with genetically modified hybrids designed to work in tandem with herbicides to reduce disease and increase yields.

These sometimes questionable scientific efficiencies have been developed in an effort to make Illinois farms more profitable. But, in a larger sense, they are a response to the need to care for the earth's population of 6 billion people, which demographers expect to balloon to 10 billion by the end of this century.

Taking care of that many people may be too much to ask of one small planet, argues naturalist Edward O. Wilson in his most recent book, *The Future of Life*, published last year by Alfred A. Knopf. The problem, he says, is that human beings are such adaptable, intelligent and fertile creatures that we have put ourselves on course to overburden the earth's resources in an effort to sustain ourselves. Yet he finds hope, too, in those qualities. Diverse groups, he writes, are joining together to use humanity's collective adaptability and intelligence to head off the ecological disaster we are about to cause. Human adaptability got us into this box, Wilson believes, and an evolving



cultural awareness can get us out.

The most dramatic downward shifts in Eurasian and New World populations, for instance, were the result of bubonic plague and smallpox, respectively. While AIDS is causing similar population declines in parts of Africa and Asia, medical research has brought under control many of the world's most devastating diseases.

Further, relatively cheap and efficient fossil fuels have provided an easily

stored and transported source of energy, allowing dense populations to live independent of the availability of local fuel supplies and climate considerations.

But the greatest contribution of science to global population growth is in agriculture. Modern mechanized farming requires less labor to produce more food. Advanced drainage and irrigation techniques have allowed the cultivation of land previously considered too wet or too dry for growing grains.

Herbicides have eliminated the competition of native plants, turning huge tracts into virtual monocultures. Pesticides have brought under control the insect plagues once capable of causing widespread famine. And advances in the understanding of the genome have enabled scientists to alter the very construction of nature,

making it possible to create plants that grow faster on poor land and in poor seasons. Genetic modification has even succeeded in creating a strain of "golden" rice that contains vitamin A, without which hundreds of thousands of the world's children go blind each year.

Though advances in agriculture have largely been limited to developed countries, the surplus this makes possible means that a relatively few producers — Argentina, Australia, Canada, the



European Union and the United States — can supply many regions with the food they are unable to grow.

So far, that is.

The precarious condition of this global pantry is clearly illustrated by the status of China, home to one out of every five people on the planet. Though China has instituted desperate controls to curb growth, its population, now at around 1.2 billion, is expected to climb to 1.6 billion by 2030. And though China leads the world in grain production, that country is nearing the break-even point in terms of supply and demand.

For China, the limiting factor is water. Seasonal flooding in the south and drought in the north have historically made control of the rivers the great challenge of Chinese life. In an effort to boost production, the Chinese government has encouraged irrigation and cultivation of ever-more-marginal croplands, while undertaking the construction of two huge dams.

Unfortunately, the siltation caused by upriver irrigation is expected to fill the new reservoirs in as few as 30 years, leaving China right back where it

started, except that it will have 400 million more mouths to feed. And by that time, it is doubtful the major food-producing countries will be in any condition to help. Canada and Australia have water problems of their own, Argentina's surplus is small and growing smaller, and the European Union and the United States have nearly reached the extent of their productive potential.

China warrants close observation. Wilson likens that country to an "unsteady giant whose missteps could rock the world." Because it is already so far along on the course toward overpopulation, problems and solutions that country discovers in the next few decades will contain important lessons for us all.

Lesson number one is about biodiversity. In China, as in the rest of the world, humans profoundly affect the earth's flora and fauna through habitat destruction. We are habitat hungry, we humans. Six billion strong and breeding, we have spilled into every marginally habitable ecosystem, suppressing or exterminating native species in the process.

Our actions can have collateral effects as well. We are a mobile, global community, and exotic species, intentionally or accidentally introduced, have had disastrous effects on native populations. In Illinois, for example, we are dealing with invasions of kudzu, zebra mussels, Asian carp and purple loosestrife, every one of which threatens to alter irrevocably the state's biological heritage.

As the human population grows and crowds together, pollution is more of a threat, too. The long-term effects of fossil fuel consumption on our atmosphere could be disastrous. And simply disposing of the materials from waste treatment plants has become a major source of surface water contamination in this state.

In short, chronic degradation of the planet's resources is beginning to take a toll.

As Wilson sees it, we have failed to budget our world's assets properly. "Having appropriated the planet's natural resources, we chose to annuitize them with a short-term maturity reached by progressively increasing payouts." In other words,



we are spending the earth's capital without investing for the future. "The result is rising per-capita production and consumption, markets awash in consumer goods and grain, and a surplus of optimistic economists."

In fact, economic prosperity, defined in terms of stock market indices, has become the only measure of success or failure in our culture. One result of this ideology has been a rapid concentration of the world's resources into the hands of relatively few individuals. According to a United Nations Human Development report, the income differential between the world's poorest and richest countries, those in the top and bottom fifths, climbed from 30-to-1 in 1960 to 74-to-1 in 1995. But Wilson argues, it is not simply a matter of helping the developing world catch up: "For the rest of the world to reach United States' levels of consumption with existing technology would require four more planet Earths."

These statistics highlight a fundamental flaw in the belief that we can continue to sustain ourselves along the path we're on. The basic units of the planet's natural capital are soon going

to run out, and in many places they already have.

Living here in the vast green carpet that is central Illinois, we find this hard to grasp. But the part of this planet that humans need for survival, the fresh water, forests, fisheries, petroleum and arable land, are fast becoming depleted. Wilson writes: "With population and consumption continuing to grow, the per-capita resources left to be harvested are shrinking. The long-term prospects are not good."

The awareness of these realities is bringing environmental activism, once considered a radical fringe, more and more into the mainstream. The Union of Concerned Scientists, with more than 60,000 members, states its mission as "rigorous scientific analysis, innovative policy development and effective citizen advocacy to achieve practical environmental solutions."

At the same time, such organizations as The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation and the Evangelical Environmental Network emphasize the spiritual implications of ecological degradation, pointing to passages like this from the book of Job: "Who

knows not that the hand of the Lord has made this? In his hand is the soul of every living thing. ... He discovers deep things out of darkness."

Wilson points to this consensus between some in the scientific and religious communities as proof that a fundamental shift in the debate is occurring. "The convergence in opinion is strong enough that the problem is no longer the reason for conservation but the best method to achieve it." He adds, optimistically, "That challenge, while enormous, can be met."

One in 20 Americans is a dues-paying member in one of the 20,000 non-governmental organizations devoted to environmental and/or humanitarian causes. Such groups as Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund are bringing the resources of private individuals to bear on the crisis facing our fragile planet.

Still, a mind-set of profligate and unsustainable consumption is entrenched in human culture. It is this that must be transformed if future generations are to have hope of their own. □

WHEN HELP HELPS

Having found a way to reward work,
let's not balance the budget on the backs of the poor

by Dan A. Lewis

For decades, legislators and scholars were baffled by the paradox of helping the poor. If we give handouts, we reward need, which makes it more attractive to seek help. In the process, we undermine self-reliance.

How do we lend a helping hand without creating dependency? The answer, Illinois has discovered over the past five years, is that you tie the help to work. If we reward those who work with assistance, then we help those who are helping themselves. This makes the recipient and the giver — the taxpayer — happy. Latching on to this solution is no small matter, for it makes helping, which has been equated with big government and wasteful spending, politically viable.

Illinois' current welfare system succeeds with the needy and the taxpayer alike, and should be preserved, if not expanded.

Financial support, child care benefits, health insurance, even tax relief, follows those who go to work. Incomes rise and, equally important, hardships fall. The gains we have witnessed in the lives of the poor over the past five years have been significant. And welfare rolls have dropped by more than 80 percent.

The latest findings of the Illinois Families Study, which followed more than 1,100 families to determine how they fared under welfare reform, reveal the

material and psychological benefits of work for those families who were surveyed. Annual earnings had increased, on average, to \$14,145 in 2001, up from \$7,485 in 1998. Fifteen percent of the respondents had such work-related benefits as employer-provided health insurance in 1999. By 2002, that had risen to 27 percent. More than three-quarters of those who were in the group that was working reported stable levels of job satisfaction. Homelessness had dropped from 7 percent to 2 percent.

Some key features of welfare reform in Illinois

WORK PAYS:

Two-thirds of earned income is disregarded when benefit levels are determined

BROAD WORK REQUIREMENTS:

Between 30 and 35 hours per week required. Definition of work-related activity is broad and includes community service, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence counseling, foster parenting and postsecondary education.

CHILD CARE:

Subsidies offered for all families at or below 50 percent of the 1997 state median income. Parent co-pay is sometimes required.

SOURCE: *University Consortium on Welfare Reform's third annual report to the Illinois legislature.*

In addition to material benefits, these families feel better, mentally and physically: A little more than 80 percent of adults surveyed reported they were experiencing "good" to "excellent" levels of health, and this number rose to 96 percent for their children. Depression also seems to have declined. Those adults reporting depressive symptoms fell from 24 percent of the total in 1999 and 2000 to 18 percent by 2002.

Further, the latest findings reveal that despite the economic downturn, those who are on welfare and working, or have left the welfare rolls to work, are holding their own. Congress and the states gave most aid recipients a deadline to find jobs and get off welfare. Illinois enacted a 60-month lifetime limit on welfare assistance, with some exceptions and provisions to stop the clock. Since then, we have seen that greater numbers of the poor are going to work, that work does pay and, most important, that those on welfare want to work.

In 2002, 95 percent of the survey's respondents agreed to some extent that "it is a good idea to require people on welfare to work."

Welfare, however, only "works" if it supports those who are working. It sounds like a lot to say that average annual income for these families has

doubled in three years, but \$14,145 is still below the poverty line for a family of three, and 67 percent of families in the survey were still living below that line. Small gains have been made in health care benefits for children, while health care benefits for adults have remained steady.

Welfare support is one area that still needs a vast amount of improvement and investment. Illinois' welfare program has experienced some success in helping these families, but most of the families still worry "a lot" about having enough money in the future. So where does that leave us in light of the state's fiscal crisis?

Illinois faces a \$5 billion deficit that requires massive cuts in the state budget. We see little chance of help from the federal government, and Gov. Rod Blagojevich has clearly said he will not support higher state income and sales taxes. The question is: Where will the cuts be made? Will they dig into child care subsidies and decimate Medicaid?

The success of Illinois' welfare reform over the past five years cannot be ignored, and the governor has clearly grasped a key to its success: Work-supports help those who are helping themselves through work. Despite the decrease in the assistance caseload, the governor is doing the right thing in recommending an increase of approximately \$49 million in child care subsidies, bringing the total to \$538 million for fiscal year 2004. More would be

better, but we should be happy for what we can get. Increasing work-supports will help those mothers and fathers who have left the dependency of welfare and who are working hard to raise their children and to put food on the table.

Having found a way to reward work, let's not balance the budget on the backs of the poor. We must do all we can to help these mothers and fathers continue in their roles as good parents and productive citizens. We should not undermine that effort. Despite calls for a higher minimum wage in Illinois, we aren't willing to challenge, in any substantial way, the low wages that those with few skills and little education earn, so we must continue to find ways to make work pay through government programs.

Illinois has developed such a system. A dollar spent by the taxpayer to reward work creates another dollar in earned income for the person we have helped. That is the kind of payoff we want to keep getting — especially when times get tough.

We can only hope that Congress and the president will understand that this payoff can work when it comes to reauthorizing welfare reform at the federal level. □

Dan A. Lewis is a professor of education and social policy and the director of the University Consortium on Welfare Reform at the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University in Evanston.

The success of Illinois' welfare reform over the past five years cannot be ignored, and the governor has clearly grasped a key to its success: Work supports help those who are helping themselves through work.

GLIMPSES

Anita Bedell has been delivering the same message to Illinois lawmakers for the past 11 years: State-sanctioned gambling is bad social policy.

So far, and she'd be first to admit this, the political walls don't appear ready to come tumbling down.

Bedell is the voice of the anti-gambling lobby in Illinois. For all intents and purposes, she *is* the anti-gambling lobby. But her message is one most lawmakers don't want to hear as she makes her rounds, especially in a year when gambling revenue could give lawmakers an easy way out of a budget crisis. Though he later clarified his position, even Gov. Rod Blagojevich looked in early May as though he were softening his stance against gambling expansion, saying he wouldn't rule out a casino in Chicago.

Still, Bedell, the executive director of the Springfield-based Illinois Church Action on Alcohol and Addiction Problems, isn't giving up on her cause. "Somebody has to speak out, speak the truth," says Bedell.

A native Illinoisan who got a bachelor's degree in business education from Illinois State University in Normal in 1969, Bedell says she has a sense of obligation to spread the word that gambling devastates families — and that pathological gamblers cost the state. "There are so many who don't speak out, who need a voice for them." Legislators, she says, are looking for a "pot of gold" and ignoring the human cost. "Rather than look for alternatives, they only look to gambling. If the legislators and the governor would look at the whole picture, they would know this is wrong for our state."

Bedell, who has been executive director of her organization for nearly a decade, came to the forefront of the gambling debate in Illinois in 1992. That's when the Rev. Tom Grey, executive director of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling, sought out Bedell's Church Action organization to wage his fight in Illinois. Bedell, who was that group's administrative assistant, urged it to join.

Since then, she has found few allies in

the Statehouse. "If they made a movie, they'd show Anita surrounded by all the gambling lobbyists and [House Gaming Committee chairman] Lou Lang and she'd be fighting them alone," Grey says.

Meanwhile, the pro-gambling lobby, Bedell notes, has an extensive team with deep coffers, allowing them to saturate the media and legislators with the gambling interests' position. "We don't have the resources to inundate them," says Bedell, who thinks she's heard, but ignored. Rep. Lang, a Skokie Democrat, invited her to speak before the committee in late March — but that was after the vice chair of his committee announced it was close to finalizing an omnibus bill. "She's formidable because she's not afraid to state her case," Lang says. But, he adds, "I believe she thinks she's ignored because she doesn't write big campaign checks."

Grey, who often lobbies with Bedell, says she "hangs in there" and states their case. "It's not over with Anita," he says. "She's certainly got the staying power to get even."

Bethany K. Warner

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Shifts at the Top

Bryan Samuels, a juvenile justice and housing policy expert for Chicago Metropolis 2020, was named to head the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Samuels, who had been serving as chair of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's DCFS task force, is also an adjunct professor at the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration. He grew up on Chicago's South Side and lived for a time at the Glenwood School for Boys because his mother struggled with mental illness and chemical dependency.

Charles "Chuck" Hartke, a Democratic state representative from Teutopolis, was tapped to direct the Illinois Department of Agriculture. Hartke stepped into the post pending Senate approval. A farmer with an 800-acre operation managed by his son, Harke had been in the Illinois House since 1985.

Bill Grunloh, 47, of Effingham was appointed to fill the 108th District seat.

Roger Walker Jr., the Macon County sheriff, became director of the Illinois Department of Corrections June 1. The Decatur native joined the sheriff's office as a patrol officer in 1972 and worked as a detective, patrol sergeant and lieutenant. In 1998, he became the state's first elected African-American sheriff. A Democrat, Walker was unopposed in his 2002 re-election bid.

Blagojevich's original nominee as corrections chief, **Ernesto Velasco**, resigned after charges surfaced about brutality by guards at the Cook County Jail during his tenure as administrator.



"Chuck" Hartke

Departure

Chicago Republican and former state Sen. **Walter Dudyecz** resigned as executive director of the Illinois Racing Board. The board, which will be merged into the Illinois Department of Revenue in July, was the subject of a critical state audit.



Walter Dudyecz

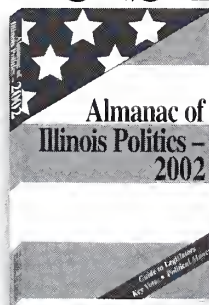
Philip replaced

Former state Senate President **James "Pate" Philip** left his Senate seat. Philip announced his resignation after the GOP lost its majority standing in that chamber in November, but he retained his seat until late April, when 79-year-old **Ray Soden** of Wood Dale was tapped to replace him. Soden served for a decade on the DuPage County Board and was president of the DuPage County Forest Preserve District for four years.



"Pate" Philip

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Appointments

Zaldwaynaka "Z" Scott, a federal prosecutor from Chicago, was named to the newly created post of state inspector general. In that position, which Gov. Rod Blagojevich created by executive order, Scott will investigate potential acts of public corruption or alleged misconduct by employees or board members of agencies that report to the governor's office. The Inspector General's Office also will maintain a toll-free phone number to take anonymous complaints about public corruption.

Scott has worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois since 1987. Most recently, she served as chief of the general crimes section. A former assistant corporation counsel for Chicago, she is an adjunct professor at Northwestern University Law School in Evanston and has taught courses at the University of Chicago Law School and John Marshall Law School, both in Chicago.

John Mitola, a CEO of a Chicago corporation, has been appointed chairman of the Illinois Toll Highway Authority. Along with board members Gov. Rod Blagojevich appointed to four-year terms, he agreed to serve without pay. Previously, the chairman and board members were paid between \$28,000 and \$32,000 a year.

Mitola, who is CEO of Electric City Corp., replaced **Art Philip**, whose term expired.

Blagojevich also reappointed Naperville Mayor **George Pradel** to the board. New board appointees are ComEd President **Frank Clark**, Interface Computer Communications CEO **David Andalcio** and retired Winnebago County Sheriff **Donald Gasparini**.

The governor said he will appoint an inspector general for the authority.

Illinois Commerce Commission attorney **Erin O'Connell-Diaz** of Chicago has been named to fill a vacancy in that regulatory agency. O'Connell-Diaz, who had been the agency's chief administrative law judge, was appointed to a five-year term and replaces **Ruth Kretschmer**, who retired in December.

Press notes

Springfield *State Journal-Register* political columnist **Bernie Schoenburg** dinged Gov. Rod Blagojevich in a recent column. Schoenburg pointed out that among the new governor's appointments to the Illinois Historic Preservation agency was **Laurie Ann Hoffman**, who is married to Rep. Jay Hoffman, a Collinsville Democrat and major Blagojevich supporter.

Hoffman, who works in a dental office, replaced **George Ryan's** appointee **Lonnie Bunch**, executive director of the Chicago Historical Society. "It's great to know that there's no more business as usual in Springfield," wrote Schoenburg. "We know that because the governor told us so."

Other appointees to the agency: **Elizabeth Smith** of Olive Branch, an administrator of an employees benefits fund, and Chicago attorney **Doug Donenfeld**.

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CORRECTION

Madison County Circuit Judge Nicholas Byron awarded a class of smokers of two brands of Philip Morris "light" cigarettes \$10.1 billion, including \$1.8 billion in lawyers' fees. Patrick Gauen's column erroneously reported that those were separate sums that added up to about \$12 billion. The difference between the \$10.1 billion award and the \$12 billion appeal bond the judge originally set reflected projected interest, not lawyers' fees.

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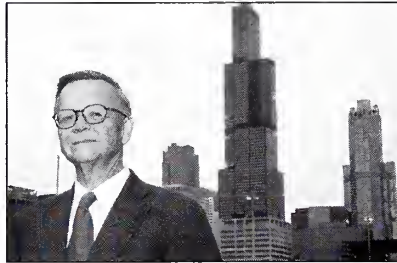
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Robert Davis



Chicago has a long way to go to get the reputation it deserves, or at least the one it wants

by Robert Davis

Early this spring, Mayor Richard Daley might have been tempted to gush, "They like us, they really like us!"

The Sunday *New York Times* had just reported in its book section that the best-selling nonfiction book of the week was *The Devil in the White City*, the story of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and how a handful of city shakers and movers put it together. And the eponymous *Chicago* had just been named the Best Movie of the Year in the worldwide Oscar ceremony telecast.

But, as with most things in a city that stubbornly clings to its status as "The Second City," even after Los Angeles surpassed it in population, the honor was tarnished, the praise tainted and the recognition a bit dubious.

The Devil in the White City, by Erik Larson, details the ego, greed and hunger for power that drove such Chicago icons as Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan and Mayor Carter Harrison. To make matters worse, it paired the story of the World's Fair with the simultaneous activities of Dr. Henry H. Holmes, dubbed the world's first urban serial killer, who dismembered several innocent young women in a huge hotel/torture chamber he had erected on the city's South Side for just that purpose. Not exactly the kind of image a city covets.

As for the movie, *Chicago* is a lively chronicle of two semi-talented Chicago showgirls who were celebrated by an

ethics-challenged Chicago media for misdeeds. The girls were corrupt, the press was corrupt, the lawyers were corrupt and the judicial system was corrupt. In essence, according to Richard Gere, the tap-dancing defense lawyer, "That's Chicago." To add insult to infamy, the movie was made not in Chicago, but in Canada.

So, once again, Chicago achieved international notoriety because of its longstanding reputation as a tough Midwestern island of corruption, where Cicero is not a legendary philosopher but an adjacent township in which Al Capone ran free in the 1920s and from which the town president was sent to prison 80 years later.

More recently, Daley didn't do much to improve this reputation when he conducted a midnight invasion of the Island Formerly Known as Meigs Field, ordering his Streets and Sanitation Department army to slash X's into the little airport's runway, preventing airplanes from using it.

The city's sports fans aren't known for their finesse either. Some would-be Jerry Springer Show celebrities dashed onto the field at Comiskey Park (oops, U.S. Cellular Park) to attack an umpire and show off their tattoos. It's not an uncommon act anywhere anymore, but it got the attention of David Letterman and Jay Leno and cemented the image of Chicago as Goonsville, USA. This was followed by some guy who got

arrested at the North Side's Wrigley Field for throwing his cell phone at a player, a fitting Yuppie response, perhaps, to the South Side incident.

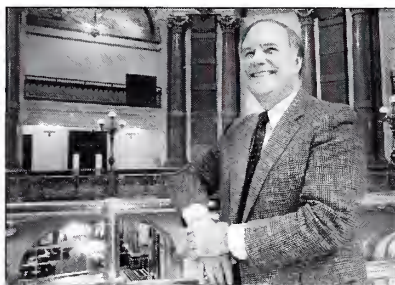
As they might say in Chicago, it ain't over yet. The White Sox field invasion caused Major League Baseball officials to flirt with canceling this summer's All-Star Game at Comiskey (OK, U.S. Cellular), but they reconsidered. So this summer, when the eyes of the nation turn to the playing fields of Chicago, it likely will be noted that in 1919, the Sox became world famous for fixing the World Series in the infamous "Black Sox Scandal." Does it never end?

Daley managed to dim memories of the 1968 Democratic Convention disaster when he successfully staged a tightly controlled and orderly Democratic Convention of his own in 1996. And maybe he will be able to lure movies back to Chicago, so audiences who go to see *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2*, supposedly set in Chicago's Greektown but also filmed in Canada, will actually see what the Second City looks like. And Northerly Island (formerly Meigs Field) might turn out to be a pretty nice park. But Chicago has a long way to go to get the reputation it deserves, or at least the one it wants.

They say Chicago is a tough city. It is. Because it has to be. □

Robert Davis, who covered government and politics for the Chicago Tribune for more than 32 years, now teaches journalism at Columbia College Chicago.

Charles N. Wheeler III



The governor was a cheerful optimist as he took a victory lap after the session ended

by Charles N. Wheeler III

"Be careful what you wish for," advises an old adage, "because you just might get it."

Gov. Rod Blagojevich might find himself reflecting on that sage advice in coming weeks, after the Illinois General Assembly sent the Democratic chief executive a \$53 billion revenue-and-spending plan for the coming fiscal year that closely resembled what he proposed some eight weeks earlier.

To be sure, Blagojevich was the cheerful optimist as he took a victory lap around the state the day after the spring session ended.

"We balanced this historic budget deficit by ending business as usual," Blagojevich told listeners at schools in Chicago, Decatur and Rockford.

Moreover, he said, the spending plan includes more money for education, health care and public safety, all without raising income or sales taxes.

The carefully honed sound bites and the TV shots of the governor with beaming schoolchildren are wonderful tools to burnish the "Reform and Renewal" image the governor's public relations advisers wish to sell to Illinois voters.

But those interested in truth-in-advertising, or "cynical insiders" in Blago-speak, might quibble with the governor's pronouncement.

For starters, the legislative handiwork has not produced a balanced budget, at least not as the term has

*Those interested
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governor's pronouncement.*

been defined for decades. But then, neither did the plan Blagojevich offered in April. From an expected \$1.6 billion in red ink when the books are closed on fiscal year 2003, the governor's original plan anticipated ending FY 04 with \$450 million in the bank to cover \$850 million in bills, for a budgetary deficit of \$400 million. That would be a dramatic improvement from the \$5 billion gap Blagojevich said the state faced, but the deficit could go higher.

Republican leaders — and even some of the governor's fellow Democrats — caution that the \$3.7 billion combination of natural revenue growth and myriad tax increases, fee hikes, fund transfers, asset sales, accounting devices and other revenue enhancements lawmakers approved at the governor's behest may well fall

some \$200 million short of covering all of the spending lawmakers authorized.

Among the questions critics say should worry the governor and his financial team:

- Will the moribund economy recover enough so that base general funds revenues — chiefly from income and sales taxes and federal aid — grow by the \$95 million the budget expects, after two years of decline?

- Can the state fetch \$230 million from the sale of the Thompson Center in Chicago, tollway headquarters in Downers Grove and unused land around the Elgin Mental Health Center?

- Will bidders pay \$350 million for the license to a riverboat casino facing a top tax rate of 70 percent? Higher casino taxes and admission fees are counted on for another \$200 million, under the governor's plan.

- Might court challenges block some of the \$326 million anticipated from sharp increases — as high as 20-fold in some cases — in licensing fees imposed on various businesses? Some legal experts question whether fees can be increased for general government spending, rather than for specific purposes linked to those paying, such as regulation of the industry assessed the fees.

- Will some of the estimated \$373 million from increased income and sales taxes — mostly on corporations

losing exemptions — be offset if the higher taxes discourage companies from locating or expanding here, as business leaders warn?

- Can the state budget director — an appointed bureaucrat — be empowered to order the state comptroller and the state treasurer — elected constitutional officers — to shift money into the state's checkbook account from dedicated funds as he sees fit? Set up as separate accounts on the state's books, the funds usually are fed by specific fees, such as fishing or hunting licenses, or voluntary donations, such as the income tax checkoffs, and used only for related activities. The governor plans to skim more than \$700 million from the funds, with the biggest hit coming from accounts earmarked for road and bridge projects.

Such revenue uncertainties prompted skeptical Republicans to label the revenue package a house of cards, likely to tumble as fall winds blow and lawmakers return for the veto session.

But Gov. Rod Blagojevich's plan will be shored up by almost \$800 million in new federal funds, a windfall coming to the state as part of the tax cut package President George W. Bush signed recently.

But Blagojevich's plan will be shored up by almost \$800 million in new federal funds, a windfall coming to the state as part of the tax cut package President George W. Bush signed recently. The governor also can cut some of the extra spending lawmakers added to his initial proposal, chiefly for education and human services.

In all, the appropriations measures before the governor would boost

general fund spending by almost \$1 billion, roughly \$300 million more than he asked for.

Lawmakers agreed with most of his priorities, starting with some \$400 million more for local school districts. The increase will allow a \$250 boost, to \$4,810, in the spending level the state guarantees for each child, as well as \$30 million more for early childhood education and almost \$100 million more for special education and other mandated programs.

The legislature also provided funding to expand health insurance programs for the working poor and to re-open Sheridan Correctional Center, two other high administration priorities.

Notwithstanding a few legislative tweaks, Blagojevich noted, lawmakers gave him 99 percent of what he sought. If all his revenue assumptions don't pan out, however, that just might be enough rope to hang himself. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.



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